The Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group: Taking a Comprehensive Look at Book Repair

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A national effort to improve the quality of book repair operations is under way. This work has been spearheaded by the Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) of the American Institute for Conservation. During the past three years LCCDG has broadly examined samples of book repair techniques in order to identify and document those practices that are appropriate for use in research library collections. In addition to close scrutiny of technical specifications, the group is addressing issues such as: expanding treatment selection guidelines to encompass historically significant materials housed in the stacks; investigating methods for achieving economic and efficient operations; defining the degree and form of documentation required; identifying educational needs within the field; and exploring ways to support training workshops and programs.

Library conservators and, to a growing degree, book repair technicians are immersed in a process of reevaluation. This critical subgroup of librarianship is taking a fresh look at its approach to repairing books and pamphlets not designated as "rare," a population of material comprising the majority of holdings in U.S. libraries. The dialogue centers on the basic guidelines of practice: How can we accomplish the greatest good for the largest portion of the collection? What are the techniques at our disposal, and how well are they serving us? What can be learned from the failure of older techniques? Are our routines for selecting, sorting, and repairing economical? Does our rationale for repair have substance? Do repair technicians have the training, resources, and support they need to perform their jobs?

Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group

Since 1992, the Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) of the American Institute of Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) has

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emerged as the principal national forum for the dialogue about book repair. Its purpose is to foster improvements in the management and implementation of conservation programs for non-rare library collections. Participants include members of the Book and Paper Group of the AIC involved in library conservation, book repair technicians, and preservation administrators responsible for repair programs. Together they have voluntarily elected to function as a liaison between the conservation and library communities, working to publicize issues related to the state of book repair in the United States. The primary role of LCCDG has been to act as a catalyst for discussions on technical and managerial options available to improve the quality and permanence of book repair within academic and research libraries.

BUFFALO

To date, the LCCDG has organized two events to review and refine treatment specifications for the full range of book repair activities. The first was at the 1992 annual conference of the AIC in Buffalo, where, on 150 linear feet of display tables, twenty-five exhibitors representing libraries from across the United States and Canada brought examples of repair work produced at their institutions or commercial facilities. Each sample was accompanied by an identification label that described salient features of the treatment specification, such as:

1. A description of the technique including materials used;
2. The type of problem it was designed to overcome;
3. The average time it took to execute;
4. The cost of materials; and
5. The number produced by the institution per year.

Exhibitors also drafted institutional profiles (which subsequently were published) to help place their work within a programmatic context (Grandinette and Silverman 1992; Silverman and Grandinette 1993). This exhibit provided the first opportunity for most participants to examine book repair techniques produced by other major repair programs and to exchange information. This workshop format proved so successful it has been adopted as a model for exchanging information at the regional level by the Association of College and Research Libraries, New England chapter, Preservation/Conservation Interest Group.

What became immediately clear from the cross-section of work exhibited in Buffalo is that nationally, book repair work has much in common. The profession has taken to heart the significant contributions of Morrow and Dyal (1986), Milevski (1985), Greenfield (1984), and Kyle (1983), authors of texts written explicitly about book repair. Our work is also indebted to others, especially John Dean and Gary Frost, who have organized many training programs and are teaching tirelessly today.

What also became clear in Buffalo was that these basic "core repair techniques" were not diverse enough to meet all the needs of collections repair. All circulating or heavily used books break down from similar types of structural damage: torn joints and hinges, broken sewing, failed adhesive textblocks, etc. But each library also has examples of bindings that need more complex solutions than have been widely discussed. Exposing professional book repair technicians and book conservators to a "trade show" of binding options results in a healthy exchange of creative ideas.

For example, when faced with damaged 18th- and 19th-century leather bindings, conservators are now more freely adopting the use of the Etherington toned Japanese paper hinge (Etherington 1992) and Cains/Espinosa board-tacketing (Espinosa and Barrios 1991)—two relatively quick solutions for reattaching leather boards. The lapped-case structure, revitalized by Frost (1982), is being adopted as a durable alternative to the traditional case binding structure. Thick and heavy volumes are receiving split-board bindings designed to accommodate their weight. First linings of paste and Japanese paper are being used before application of a second lining of polyvinyl acetate adhesive (PVA) to prevent the

PVA from coming into direct contact with the folds of the sections. Finally, spine labels are "generated" with computer graphic arts programs and printed with laser printers.

Denver

Needless to say, one meeting was not enough. LCCDG reconvened at the annual conference of the AIC in Denver in 1993; again participants brought book repair samples. This time the LCCDG members were organized into groups that paired types of damage with similar types of treatment options. Isolating thirty or more examples of specific solutions allowed conservators and technicians to work toward consensus on standardizing book repair nomenclature. Also addressed were organizational and philosophical topics that pertain to library collections repair.

Book Repair as a Discipline

The environment in which library conservation is practiced varies considerably from other conservation disciplines. Libraries, books, and reading are more commonly integrated into daily life than, for instance, an oil painting or a Renaissance sculpture. Their utilitarian use exposes books regularly to more than contemplative appreciation; they are borrowed, stowed, photocopied, deposited in book drops, and inadvertently abused. Also significant to their longevity is the rate of deterioration of the organic materials making up the physical book, a factor equally weighty in the preservation of all artistic or historic objects.

The primary goal of library preservation is to extend the useful life of each item in the collection for as long as it is needed to satisfy the institution's objectives. Book repair can contribute significantly to preventing and correcting certain types of damage and forms one component of a comprehensive preservation program. In light of a library's programmatic options, alternative approaches can provide solutions as well, and decision makers must weigh a number of variables such as condition, use, value, and structure of the specific book in hand. For example, if the text is brittle, it might require replacement or reformatting. If the book is rare, it might need the services of a conservator. If its paper is strong, the margins sufficiently wide, and its projected use utilitarian, the book may be sent for commercial library binding. However, if library binding is inappropriate due to considerations of speed, economy, or specific need for additional care in its treatment, the book might well require book repair.

Use-Driven Programs

Under the shadow of decreasing budgets, institutions, from the impoverished to the well-endowed, require responsible management of their resources. For this reason, book repair is predominately "use" driven; that is, damaged items selected for repair are identified as a result of screening that occurs after circulation or prior to reshelving. This approach embodies the realization that a damaged book in use is at greater risk of sustaining further damage than a damaged book at rest on the shelf.

Batch-Work

An efficient book repair program strives to process large numbers of materials and return them in useful condition to circulation. The ideal is to work economically to perform treatments that are at once neat, quick, tough, and nondamaging. Periodic, ongoing maintenance can improve a collection's overall condition.

Workflow and strategic organization are critical elements to a repair program's success. In pursuit of efficiency, book repair operations often incorporate "batch-work," that is, the practice of identifying a group of materials exhibiting similar treatment problems, performing a discrete step to each book before proceeding to the next step, and working through this cycle of repairs until all books in a group are completed. This approach contrasts with rare book conservation, which generally engages in one-of-a-kind treatments,

although batch-work has a role there as well. Ideally, a book repair operation approaches its work with a full complement of options and relies on either approach as needed, acknowledging that even with batch-work, the competent technician must make adjustments for variations between individual books, such as in determining board thickness or the position of a joint.

Treatment to Specification

Book repair employs what Glen Ruzicka calls "treatment to specification." This approach allows a single well-trained supervisor to coordinate with a high degree of success the work of a large number of technicians or student employees. Contrasting the difference between single-item conservation and book repair, Ruzicka (1992, 17–18) suggests:

> In book repair, one or more specifications are defined and items for treatment are grouped according[ly] . . . . The [rare book] conservator begins with the item and derives the specs, the book repairer begins with the specs and defines the item ("this is a reback"; "this is a hinge repair") . . . the definition of the specifications is key. A variety of specifications are desirable; however, too many options can lead to a random, "How shall I do it this time" approach. Book repair is not conservation. Treatment to specification is essential to any book repair service, in-house or on contract. Conservation treatment, on the other hand, can function with six or sixty alternative treatment specifications.

Treatment to specification requires that considerable thought and time be devoted to developing specifications that meet a specific institution's requirements. The specification should include a description of the applicability of the treatment, a description of the technique detailing all steps and materials used, and the time the treatment takes on average to perform. There is a growing consensus that written treatment specifications, in conjunction with the date of treatment routinely recorded in the finished book, can function as treatment documentation en masse for non-rare library materials. These records provide a repair department with feedback about the effectiveness and durability of specific techniques over time, and document the evolution of materials for future reference.

Selection for Treatment

Matching a treatment problem to a repair specification is handled on an item-by-item basis. The decisions governing the flow of work through the repair shop must balance a number of variables, including:

1. The appropriateness and availability of other preservation options for treating damaged materials, including library binding;
2. The total number of items needing repair based on the library's use patterns and the overall condition of the collection;
3. The rate of flow through the shop based on availability of staff, their technical proficiency, and the library's rate of demand for finished work; and
4. The appropriateness of the technical solutions selected for the material being treated.

Inadvertent but permanent damage to the collection can occur through the application of techniques that later prove undesirable. While each library must establish its own approach to setting treatment guidelines, certain materials require additional attention if they are to be properly preserved. For example, due to current rebinding practices there is growing concern among some conservators and librarians about the loss of original 19th- and early 20th-century publishers' bindings. These books are no longer produced. They lack the protection afforded books housed in special collections and they are disappearing at an alarming rate.

Formal criteria to prevent the loss of this material are being implemented, as demonstrated by Harvard's "Collection Guidelines at Widener Library" (Schrock 1992, 40). Guidelines to help selectors identify these endangered books should include the following considerations:

1. Rarity, i.e., uniqueness;

2. Historical significance, i.e., exemplifying physical evidence of technological advancements that accompanied 19th-century industrialization;
3. Artistic attribution, i.e., the "signature" or monograms of the designer, artist, engraver, printer or binder who contributed to the work's production; and,
4. Aesthetic excellence, as determined using local criteria.

Training Opportunities

Book repair training has been offered in a large variety of formats to accommodate persons of varying skill levels and the needs and resources of different libraries. Throughout the 1980s funding was sought and received for training programs, and several book repair manuals were published. For example, in 1980 Johns Hopkins University received funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to conduct four workshops, three consultancies, and two three-month internships a year for three years. In 1981, the Illinois State Library approved Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) funding to support the Illinois Cooperative Conservation Program, which emphasized book repair workshops. During this same period, the H.W. Wilson Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities supported a series of workshops taught at the New York Botanical Garden Preservation Center. Also in 1980, the Guild of Book Workers conducted its first annual Seminar on Excellence in Bookbinding. At these seminars, experts in conservation and the book arts demonstrate techniques, giving participants an opportunity to see skillful workmanship and samples of beautifully executed work.

The 1980s also saw an increase in the literature relating specifically to the repair of nonrare library materials. These publications supported training efforts, and they assisted in-house programs by providing a rationale for updating their approach to repair or providing techniques for programs that were newly forming. Jane Greenfield published a series of pamphlets in 1980 and 1981 outlining techniques for making wraparounds, pamphlets, tip-ins and pockets, among others (Greenfield 1980, 1981, 1982). Her book, *Books: Their Care and Repair,* was published in 1984 (Greenfield 1984). The first edition of Carolyn Morrow's *Conservation Treatment Procedures: A Manual of Step-by-Step Procedures for the Maintenance and Repair of Library Materials* was published in 1982 (Morrow 1982). A second edition written by Morrow and Carol Dyal was printed in 1986 (Morrow and Dyal 1986). The *Library Materials Preservation Manual,* by Hedi Kyle, with contributions by Nelly Balloffet, Judith Reed, and Virginia Wisniewski-Klett, was published in 1983 (Kyle 1983). Robert Milevski's *Book Repair Manual* was published in 1985 (Milevski 1985), and the Library of Congress issued a series of six videotapes, *Library Preservation: Fundamental Techniques,* in 1986 (Library Preservation 1986).

Conservators and preservation administrators are working together to ensure that training opportunities continue to be made available. While much has been done on a "formal" level, it should also be noted that many preservation programs have throughout the years served as a state and local resource, providing training and assistance to neighboring institutions.

An ambitious approach to book repair training occurred in 1992, when forty conservators and preservation administrators from across the country were invited to the University of California, Berkeley, to participate in a planning program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The goal of this program was to develop teaching modules. As a result of this meeting, funding has been awarded by the NEH for regional training programs in the Pacific Northwest, the Mountains/Plains states, the South, and California and Hawaii. Also, a series of workshops was offered in the Southwest region in the spring of 1994 on a cost-recovery basis. These workshops were sponsored by AMIGOS in collaboration with the Preservation and Conservation Education Programs, University of Texas Preservation

Department, and BookLab. It is hoped that other proposals of this kind are still forthcoming.

Conclusion

Treatment of rare and non-rare library materials holds these basic principles in common:

1. The materials used for the repairs should be of high quality;
2. The repair should be non-damaging and appropriate for the book; and
3. The conservator or technician must exercise care, dexterity, and judgment.

Library conservators who are responsible for non-rare materials are actively working to facilitate their preservation. Prerequisites for accomplishing this collectionwide task include improved access to human and material resources and opportunities to motivate people through professional training and workshops. Both are needed to gain a foothold on a problem that is being dwarfed in the face of the looming electronic library. But books continue to be published and acquired. Maintaining them in usable condition is as important as providing bibliographic access. Their repair must be addressed now and for the future so that they can be read and shared.

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